
The Cologne Mani Codex Reconsidered

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THE COLOGNE MANI CODEX RECONSIDERED

ALBERT HENRICHS

MANICHAËISM was a religion which crossed cultural divides and which during Mani's own lifetime (A.D. 216–276) made converts in countries as distant as Egypt and Chorasmia. Its ability to attract men and women of widely different nationalities reflects Mani's own syncretistic background. He grew up in the multicultural environment of Mesopotamia where Semitic, Greek, and Iranian dialects were spoken. In his formative years, he came under the influence of Jewish, Jewish-Christian, Christian, Gnostic, Persian, and perhaps Babylonian cults, thought, and literatures. Before the discovery of the Cologne Codex, very little was known about Mani's childhood and youth.¹ In 216 Mani's father Pattik joined a baptist sect in the marshes of southern Babylonia and arranged to have his infant son brought to him. Mani had a revelation at the age of twelve which changed the course of his life and alienated him from the baptists with whom he was living. The angel who transmitted that revelation was called "twin companion" (in other words, he was Mani's celestial alter ego). Mani split with the baptists when he was twenty-four years old, and his first public appearance as a missionary of his new creed is said to have coincided with the coronation of Shapur I as king of Iran.² And finally, the names of Mani's very first followers were Simeon, Zako, and Pattik, Mani's father.

¹ The present study, which is essentially the text of a lecture delivered at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, on May 22, 1978, has a twofold purpose: to establish a written record of the earliest stages of decipherment of the Cologne Codex and to review the ancient evidence for the Book of Elchasai and its possible influence on Mani's baptists. For other details outside this limited scope the reader is referred to the following basic bibliography on the Cologne Mani Codex (CMC): A. Henrichs and L. Koenen, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* [= ZPE] 5 (1970) 97–216 (preliminary report), ZPE 19 (1975) 1–85 (edition of CMC 1–72.7), ZPE 32 (1978) 87–199 (edition of CMC 72.8–99.9); A. Henrichs, *HSCP* 77 (1973) 23–59; K. Rudolph, in *Mélanges d'histoire des religions offerts à Henri-Charles Puech* (1974) 471–486; L. Koenen, *Illinois Classical Studies* 3 (1978) 154–195.

² This synchronism, which is reported in the *Fihrist* (below, n.3), is erroneous. See the editors' comments on CMC 18.1 ff.

I. THE NEW MANI VITA

All this information comes from a chapter on Manichaeism in the *Fihrist*, an Arabic encyclopedia of the tenth century.³ The Cologne Codex, deciphered in 1969, confirms, clarifies, and expands every aspect of it. The connections will become clearer when we summarize the actual content of this new source. A detailed but legendary account of Mani's childhood can be found on pp. 1-13. Mani claims to have been on speaking terms with the supernatural at the tender age of four when he first received divine visitations. Miracle stories describe in graphic detail how trees and plants bled and cried for help when the baptists tried to prune them or to harvest their fruit, and how Mani refused to participate in such sacrilege. These tales illustrate a particular doctrine of Mani's theology. The Manichees believed that all organic substances contained particles of light which were divine and waiting for salvation. In their eyes, the real crucifixion of Christ was not a one-time event but the ongoing suffering of Light imprisoned in Matter. St. Augustine quotes similar Manichaean legends but scholars were inclined to think that he had made them up in order to ridicule the creed to which he himself once belonged. The Cologne Codex proves that they are genuinely Manichaean.⁴

On pp. 14-44, we find long and valuable excerpts from Mani's own works in which he describes the circumstances and contents of his two major revelations and the function of his twin. Mani's "twin companion" (*σὺζυγος*) is the personification of a typically Gnostic concept, the transcendent projection of one's soul. Mani expressed his sense of identity with the twin in poignant lines, for instance on p. 24: "I recognized him and realized that I am he from whom I was separated."⁵

What follows on pp. 45-72 is a long and apologetic digression in which five Jewish apocalypses (otherwise unattested) and two of St. Paul's letters are quoted with title in an attempt to lend credibility to Mani's visionary experiences and to his own accounts of them. Because of its exclusive focus on the history of revelation, this particular excerpt would seem to be less relevant for one's understanding of Mani's life than the biographical pieces which precede and follow it. But its inclusion in the codex, and its calculated placement in the surrounding biographical material, serve to identify the anonymous editor of the

³ *The Fihrist of al-Nadim*, ed. and trans. Bayard Dodge (1970) II 773-775.

⁴ Koenen (above, n.1) 176 ff; Henrichs, *BASP* 16 (1979) 85-108.

⁵ Koenen (above, n.1) 173 f.

anthology: he was not a mechanical compiler but had a mind of his own that has left its mark on the arrangement of the entire collection.⁶

The next thematic unit, on pp. 72–99, is doubtless the part which has the greatest historical interest and which has already revolutionized the former state of Manichaean studies. It deals in various ways with the customs and rituals of the baptists, and with Mani's opposition to them.

A vivid account of Mani's physical separation from the baptists and of his escape to the city of Ctesiphon follows on pp. 100–116. At the height of their controversy some of the baptists tried to kill Mani, but the intercession of his father, a high-ranking baptist, saved his life. Mani despaired, but the celestial twin appeared to comfort him. He sent Mani on his mission, telling him that two of the baptists and Mani's father would be his first followers. One of the two is called Abizachias, apparently the same man as the Zako mentioned in the Arabic encyclopedia. Mani and his two baptist friends left their village secretly. But as they crossed the bridge over the Tigris to Ctesiphon, another baptist recognized them and informed Mani's father, who finally joined them in the Sassanian capital.⁷

The rest of the codex is filled with a description of their missionary journeys. They must have been successful. One miraculous conversion story follows another. People from opposite walks of life were attracted to Mani's religion. A shaggy hermit who lived on a remote mountain was converted by Mani and returned to society as a missionary of his

⁶ See my essay "Literary Criticism of the *CMC*" to be published in the Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism held at Yale University in March 1978; *ZPE* 32 (1978) n.269 on *CMC* 94.1.

⁷ It is extremely probable that Mani was born in or near Ctesiphon, a region from which the baptists recruited Mani's father and other followers (the baptist Aianos from Coche, the twin city of Ctesiphon on the opposite side of the Tigris, is mentioned at *CMC* 98.10 f). Cf. the *Fihrist* trans. Dodge (above, n.3) II 773 f: "It is said that his father's origin was at Hamadhān, and that he moved to Babylon and lived at al-Madā'in [cf. *ai póleis*, the twin cities of Coche and Ctesiphon, at *CMC* 111.4], in the place known as Ctesiphon, where there was a temple of idols which Futtuq [i.e., Pattik, Mani's father] used to frequent as the other people did. One day someone cried to him in the temple of idols with a shout, 'Oh, Futtuq, do not eat meat! Do not drink wine! Do not marry a human being!' [below, n.48]. This was repeated for him a number of times during three days. Then, after Futtuq had perceived this, he became connected with a group of people in the environs of Dastumisān [*νήσος τῶν Μαισανίων* at *CMC* 140.5 ff] known as the Mughtasilah [= *βαπτιστάι*]. There is still a remnant of them in those regions and watered districts, even in this our own time. They belonged to the cult which Futtuq was ordered to join when his wife was pregnant with Mānī. When she gave birth to him . . ." On the problem of the location of Mani's birthplace, see H.-Ch. Puech, *Le Manichéisme* (1949) 34 f.

new faith (pp. 126–129). The next episode shows Mani in higher circles: a local shah and his court were so impressed by Mani's preaching and by two impromptu appearances of the twin that they became Manichees (pp. 130–134).

The remaining sixty pages of the codex, though in very fragmentary condition, contribute to the early history of Manichaeism various geographical names which document the extent of Mani's first travels and confirm similar information in the Coptic *Kephalaia*.⁸ Among the more interesting places is Pharat in Mesene, or Maišān, the major port of southern Babylonia. The Syriac Hymn of the Pearl, a Gnostic text which Mani knew, describes Maišān as "the central market for the merchants from the east." In fact Pharat was the port of embarkation for trade with India. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that four pages later the codex mentions merchant ships which sail to Persia and India (p. 144). Mani himself made the passage to India during his first or second year as a missionary. It is at this point in Mani's career that the Cologne Codex fails us. Other sources continue the chronicle, but only after an interval of many years.

II. LOOKING BACK

After this brief survey of the new text as we now know it, I propose to set the clock back and to turn to the events in 1969 which led to the restoration and decipherment of the manuscript. The initial identification did not take place at the University of Cologne, where the codex is kept, but in a suburb of Vienna. On June 14, 1969, I arrived in Vienna carrying an inconspicuous cigar box which would turn out to be a "cave of treasures." I was met at the station by Dr. Anton Fackelmann, the eminent restorer of ancient manuscripts. Once at the Fackelmann home, we opened the box and removed four small and fragile lumps of conglutinated and parched vellum from their cotton wrappings. The largest and thickest lump measured four by four centimeters, or an inch and a half crosswise and lengthwise. It was smaller than the palm of a hand and could be lifted easily with two fingers. After a brief examination of the fragments, Fackelmann shook his head in disbelief and despair. He turned to me and told me that he had never seen such a mess.

At that time the true identity of the codex was completely unknown. It was obvious that each lump consisted of one or more quires of vellum leaves, and that the total number of leaves was very large. But because

⁸ *Keph.* 15.24–31, 184.23–185.17; *HSCP* 77 (1973) 41 n.66.



FIG. 1

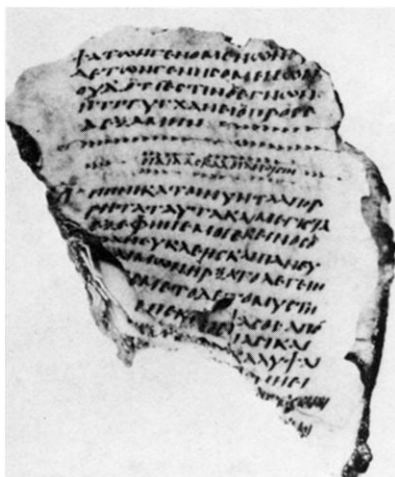


FIG. 2



FIG. 3

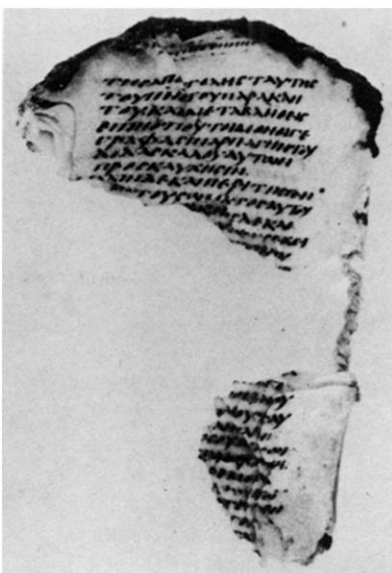


FIG. 4

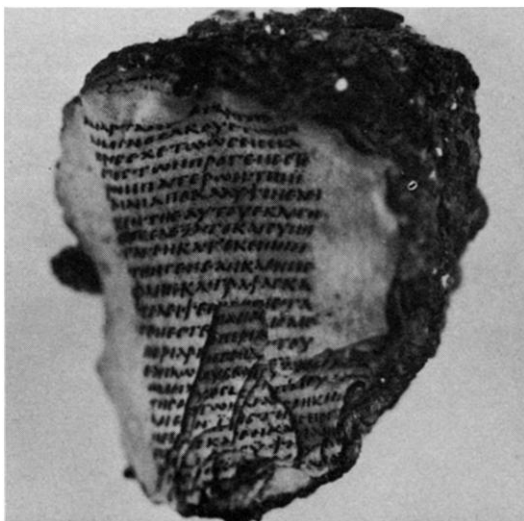


FIG. 5

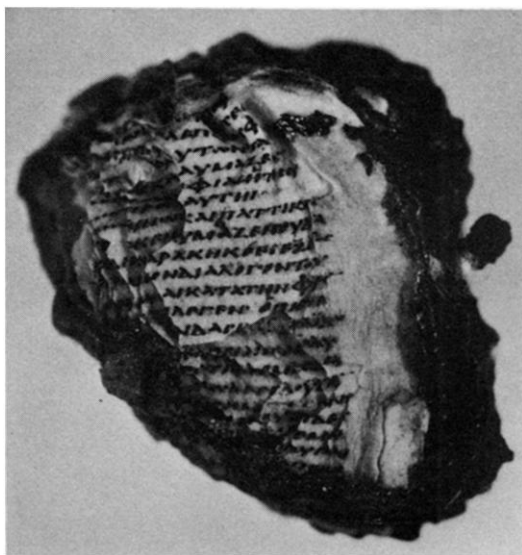


FIG. 6

they were glued together and could not be turned, their content remained inaccessible. Fragmentary passages of Greek text were visible on the outer surfaces of each lump. Although they were not hard to read, their study proved frustrating and inconclusive. Let us review for a moment what was known about their content before the codex arrived in Vienna.

The obverse of the first fragment (fig. 1) was too stained and shriveled to merit close attention at this early stage of decipherment. But its reverse, which is now known as p. 26 of the codex, provided tentative evidence that the book's content was religious and esoteric (fig. 2). The rubric which divides that page into two uneven halves reads *οἱ διδάσκαλοι λέγουσιν*, "tradition of the teachers." It is followed by a passage which describes the revelation of secret knowledge in the language typical of Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic revelation literature. Key terms such as "secrets" (*ἀπόρρητα*), "he made manifest" (*ἐξέφηνε*), "mystery" (*μυστήριον*), and "I revealed" (*ἀπεκάλυψα*) occur within the short space of seven lines.⁹

Fragment two is of technical interest because it preserves the original thread with which six pairs of leaves were stitched together at the center fold to form a coherent quire. The obverse of that fragment (fig. 3), p. 29 of the codex, comes from a highly metaphorical context and uses the image of the divine gardener to promise the eventual eradication of the forces of evil. Because of its allusive nature, this page remained almost incomprehensible for a long time.

The reverse of fragment two (fig. 4), p. 46 of the codex, added three memorable phrases and confirmed the impression that the new document was religious, esoteric, and presumably Christian. First, there is the Johannine designation of the Holy Spirit as *πνεῦμα τὸ παράκλητον* in line 2.¹⁰ Three lines later, reference is made to "the mystical rapture (*ἄρπαγή*) of the teacher" and to those who have written about it. According to Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, the term *ἄρπαγή* was used in that sense by some Christian exegetes who commented on St. Paul's claim that he had been caught up to the third heaven. Two or three scholars in Cologne saw this page of the codex before the fragments were sent to Vienna. They did not dream that the new document dealt with Mani, who elsewhere in the codex would describe his own visionary experience in language borrowed from St. Paul, or that the relevant autobiographical passages from 2 Corinthians and from Galatians were

⁹ CMC 26.6–13.

¹⁰ Koenen (above, n.1) 167–176.

quoted verbatim on pages 60 to 62 by one of Mani's apologetic disciples.

Still on p. 46 and right below the blank space at the end of line 7, there was another notable phrase, *περὶ τῆς γέννης τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ*, or "On the birth of his body." We were surprised to discover that the words *περὶ τῆς γέννης* recur in the upper margin of the same page where they are written in smaller letters surrounded by decorative flourishes. This coincidence seemed at first puzzling. We did not and could not know at that time that this phrase, divided into two equal halves, was used throughout the codex as a running title at the top of each pair of facing pages. Nor did we realize then that "his body" meant "Mani's body" and that in Manichaean eyes the body of Mani had both a literal and a spiritual reality. In the literal sense, Mani's body was the vehicle of his earthly life, and it was appropriate to refer to it in the title of Mani's biography. In the pneumatic sense, which was influenced by Pauline christology, Mani's body was Mani's church so that the story of Mani's life became the first chapter in the history of his church.¹¹ In short, then, we naturally failed to recognize the programmatic content of p. 46 when we first studied it in May 1969.

The third and largest lump of vellum contained 74 pages of Greek text, compared to a total of 192 extant pages. Fig. 5 is a reproduction of the obverse of fragment three, p. 47. But prior to the restoration of the codex, the relative order of the four fragments was unknown. It did not occur to us to connect this page with the last page of fragment two, which precedes it and actually faces it in the restored codex. If we had made the connection, we would have paid more attention to the upper margin of p. 47 where we read the familiar words *τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ*, which continue the running title from p. 46.

As for its content, p. 47 reiterates the theme of revelation. Forefathers are mentioned who made known their revelations to men of their choice (*ἐκλογή*) and who wrote them down for posterity. The term *ἐκλογή* for an elite church has a Gnostic ring, and the same can be said for the written tradition of secret knowledge. Again, p. 47 suggested that the book was in a very general sense Gnostic, but it contained no hint that it was Manichaean.

The five fragmentary pages of the codex which I have discussed so far were published in 1975. As we turn to the reverse of fragment three, we find ourselves at the end of the best-preserved portion of the codex which describes Mani's break with the baptist sect and the first beginnings of his mission. Under magnification, the back of this fragment

¹¹ Koenen (above, n.1) 164–166.

looks like a layer cake nibbled at by a battalion of starving mice (fig. 6). Irregular holes in several of the superimposed codex leaves serve as windows which open partial vistas into underlying layers of vellum. The continuous text in the center of the fragment belongs to p. 118. The extant words are too few and too incoherent to make much sense. But directly below the blank space at the end of line 7 there is a strange proper name which catches the eye. The name is Pattikios. This name alone would have been sufficient to establish the Manichaean identity of the codex, because it is the attested name of Mani's father. But at that time we had never heard of Mani's father. We could not even trace that name to any recorded holder because no Greek lexicon lists it. Again, the truth eluded us.

The fourth and last piece of the codex begins with p. 121, which is shown in figure 7, and ends with p. 192, of which very few letters survive. As we now know, p. 121 belongs to the itinerary of Mani's first travels, which led him to the Sassanid province of Media in northwest Iran. The name of "the Medes" (*τῶν Μήδων*) occurs at the beginning of line 6. The first words of lines 7 and 11 respectively are *Γουνναζακ* and *Γαναζακ*, variant spellings of the same place name.¹² The place is Ganzak in Media Atropatene, or modern Azerbaijan, 150 miles south-east of Tabriz. During the Sassanian period, Ganzak was an important center of the royal fire cult. Northern Media was far removed from the mainstream of Christianity or even Gnosticism, and the odd geographical reference did not seem to tie in with our working hypothesis that the codex was Gnostic. And so I went to Vienna hoping to resolve this and other questions and to uncover the mystery of the "Gnostic" codex.

Let us briefly return to the events in Vienna. Here I was with the mysterious fragments and with the one person able to make them legible, only to be told by him that he was more than skeptical about the outcome. But the miracle happened, and happened fast. Within a few hours of my arrival, and with the help of a chemical solvent manufactured in the United States, Dr. Fackelmann managed to soften the brittle material. When he finally separated the first vellum leaf unharmed from the bulk of fragment three, it turned out to be a detached remnant of the preceding quire. It was later identified as the last leaf of quire two, pages 47 and 48 of the codex. From then on the pages came off much faster than I could transcribe them. By the end of the first afternoon,

¹² The two different vocalizations of the same radicals within five lines of the same page are another indication that the *CMC* was translated from an Aramaic original (below, n.17).



FIG. 7

several conjugate leaves had been separated, each containing four pages of Greek text.

The particular section of the codex which we had uncovered happened to contain long quotations from five different apocalypses, each under the name of a different Adamite.¹³ The first is ascribed to Adam himself and the last to Henoch, and their content is new but repetitious. Only later did it become clear that this part of the codex constituted a long digression and was untypical of the rest, and that the five revelation texts were in fact not Manichaean in origin but borrowed from Jewish sources.

But the truth was just around the corner. On the morning of June 15, 1969, I finished my transcription of the apocalypses. The emphasis on divine revelation continued on the next two pages with relevant quotations from St. Paul. A couple of pages further on I found another quotation, this time from a letter which "our father" had sent to

¹³ CMC 48.16–60.8. These texts contain nothing specifically Gnostic.

Edessa. Edessa was the most cultured city in eastern Syria, the cradle of Syrian Christianity, but who was "our father"? The next page brought the answer. The crucial sentence on p. 66 reads: "He said in the Gospel of his most holy hope: 'I, Mani, the apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, the Father of Truth, from whom I was born.'" I found it difficult to believe my eyes. The author who introduced himself in the manner of St. Paul was no less a man than Mani himself, the founder of Manichaeism, a world religion which rivaled Christianity from the middle of the third century down to the Arab conquest. The quotation which solved the mystery of the codex is the beginning of Mani's gospel, one of his five canonical books. What follows on the next four pages of the codex is the longest surviving excerpt from that important missionary work which outlined Mani's message of salvation to the world.

A few hours later I called Professor Koenen, then curator of the Cologne papyrus collection. I told him that the restoration had been successful, that the content of the codex was new and Manichaean, and that it was a sensation, a scholar's dream. But it took several more weeks before we knew that the new Manichaean text was actually the earliest part of a continuous biography which has thrown unexpected light on the darkest period of Mani's life, his first twenty-four years.

This is basically the known story of the "discovery" of the Mani codex. It is not untypical. Ancient manuscripts which antedate the Byzantine period are almost never identified at the place of their original discovery, and more often than not the circumstances of their disinterment are shrouded in obscurity and secrecy. The Cologne Codex is no exception. Rumor has it that the remains of the codex were located several decades ago in Luxor, and it is a reasonable guess that they were found in the vicinity of ancient Lykopolis, a stronghold of Manichaeism in Upper Egypt.¹⁴ In other words, next to nothing is known about the fate of the Mani Codex before it reached Cologne.

In the course of restoration, the four vellum lumps yielded one hundred and ninety-two codex pages. But this total is misleading. Not a single page escaped damage in the sands of Egypt. In assessing the losses the minute size of the codex must be kept in mind. The loss of even the tiniest segment of writing surface inevitably affects several successive lines and disrupts the continuity of sizable portions of text. Less than forty pages from the center of fragment three, or one fifth of

¹⁴ L. Koenen, *ZPE* 11 (1973) 240 f.

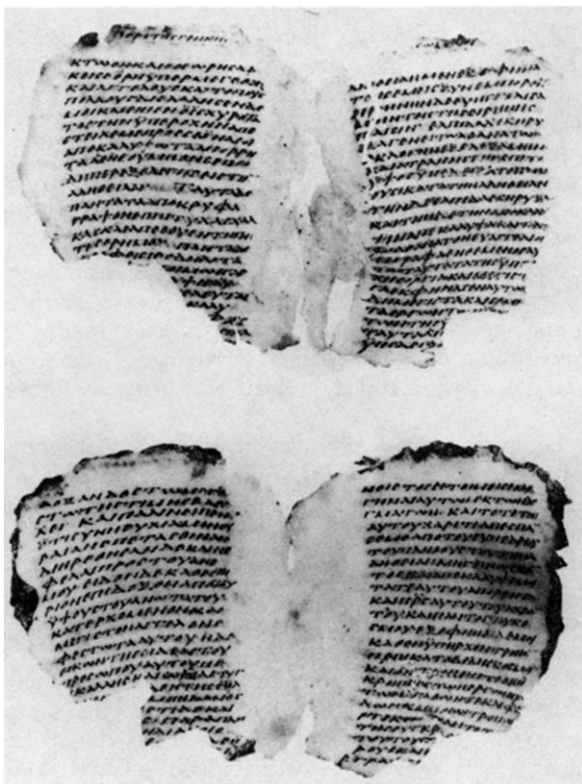


FIG. 8 (original size)

what remains, suffered comparatively minor damage along the lower end of their outer margins. Their content can be usually reconstructed in its entirety. But seventy-five pages from the end of the codex survive in such fragmentary condition that isolated words or letters are all that is left.

Before they were returned to Cologne, the leaves were photographed and placed under protective sheets of transparent Plexiglass. In the original codex, six conjugate leaves, or twenty-four pages, were assembled to form one quire. Eight quires survive, and it is likely that many more perished. The complete biography of Mani will have filled more than one codex, or dozens of quires. After conservation, three conjugate leaves, or half of a quire, were arranged vertically under one

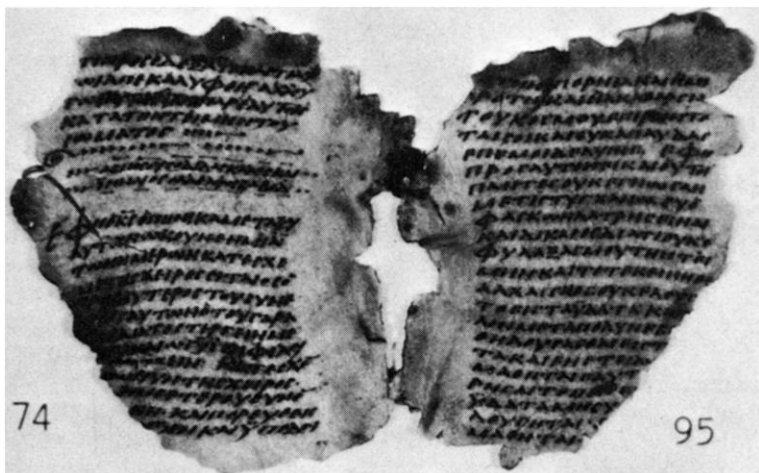


FIG. 9

cover, with the center leaf at the bottom. In their present arrangement, they no longer look like a book, but resemble a collection of exotic butterflies in a showcase.

The Cologne Codex is a masterpiece of ancient book production (fig. 8). Written in the fifth century A.D. on vellum of the finest quality, it is the smallest manuscript known from antiquity. When closed the book measured 3.5 by 4.5 centimeters, or 1.4 by 1.8 inches. It was the size of a small matchbox. Several Greek and Coptic codices of similar pocket-size have been found. They have between three and eleven lines of writing per page, and contain biblical texts. By contrast, the Cologne Codex has twenty-three lines of text per page, the running title not included. We know that the Manichees treasured their sacred books. Their bibliophilism had a religious motivation: they produced beautiful manuscripts out of veneration for the spirit of the letter.¹⁵

A striking and unusual feature in the layout of the codex is the occasional use of captions in the middle of a page. They provide the names and sometimes the titles of Manichaean authorities for the passages which follow the captions. Their names are often Semitic, because Mani lived in Mesopotamia and spoke an Aramaic dialect. Many of the names quoted in the codex were already known from other Manichaean

¹⁵ ZPE 5 (1970) 100 ff; O. Klíma, *Manis Zeit und Leben* (1962) 332 f.

or Christian sources. Their historicity is therefore beyond doubt. A typical example can be found on p. 74 (fig. 9). Its caption reads: "Abiesus the Teacher and Innaïos, Zabed's son." After long pages of monotonous copying, a new caption was a welcome break in the scribe's routine. For a brief moment, he could indulge in drawing ornaments rather than letters. And indulge he did. In fact our scribe never used the same combination of ornaments twice.

Mani's biography is formally an anthology, and unique in its kind. The narrative is not continuous, nor is it the work of a single author. It consists of excerpts from the writings of Mani's immediate disciples which an unknown editor collected and arranged in the chronological order of their contents. In many cases the disciples describe events in Mani's early life at which they were not present. They apparently reproduced what Mani himself had told them. This explains why their accounts are invariably introduced by brief formulae of authentication of the type "The Lord said" (ἐφη ὁ κύριος).¹⁶ The new section which follows the caption on p. 74 begins with these very words. In early Christian literature, the Sayings of Jesus provide an important parallel. It could be argued that the Mani codex is in essence a proto-gospel, except that the Lord is Mani, not Jesus. Justin Martyr described the synoptic gospels as "apostolic memoirs," a description which would be entirely appropriate for the kind of information on which Mani's biography is based. The Islamic tradition of tracing prophetic sayings to Muhammad and his immediate disciples through an elaborate chain of identified intermediaries seems to be a direct imitation of Manichaean practice (see n.16).

We do not know the date when the compilation was made. Very likely it was made soon after Mani's death in 276 from sources written during his lifetime. Their language was Eastern Aramaic, not Greek.¹⁷ The Greek of the Cologne Codex is the product of translation and

¹⁶ HSCP 77 (1973) 29-31; Koenen (above, n.1) 164 n.37. Compare the Muslim "Tradition," or Ḥadīth, collections of words and deeds of Muhammad as reported by himself or by one of his companions, and invariably introduced by fixed formulae such as "The Apostle of God said," "The Prophet said," or simply "He said"; cf. J. Robson, "Ḥadīth," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., III (1971) 23-28; W. A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam* (1977) ch. 1 and pt. 3.

¹⁷ Mani spoke and wrote an Eastern Aramaic dialect, which must have been his native language. See M. Lidzbarski, *OLZ* 30 (1927) 913-917 (rep. in G. Widengren, ed., *Der Manichäismus* [1977] 249-254); F. Rosenthal, *Die aramaische Forschung seit Th. Nöldeke's Veröffentlichungen* (1939) 207-211 (= *Der Manichäismus* 255-259); H. J. Polotsky, *RE Suppl.* 6 (1935) 243.35 ff = *Collected Papers* (1971) 700.

imitates the Greek of the Septuagint and of the New Testament, although some words occur which are only attested in pagan literature. But certain peculiarities of syntax, and occasional phrases which are unidiomatic in Greek, still reflect the Syriac original. The most striking mistranslation can be found on p. 84, where Mani attacks the daily ablutions of the baptists in whose midst he had grown up. He contrasts their external purifications with the true spiritual purification, which he defines as follows: "Separation of light from darkness, of death from life, and of the living waters from those which are terrified."¹⁸ Obviously "living waters" (ὕδατα ζῶντα) and "terrified waters" (ὕδατα τεταμνωμένα) are intended as an antithesis, like life and death. But "terrified" is clearly not the right word. Something has gone wrong here. We expect the same contrast between living water and stagnant or turbid water which we find in Gnostic and Mandaean texts about baptism.¹⁹ According to the standard Syriac and Mandaic dictionaries, the Semitic root *TMH*, or by metathesis *THM*, has a semantic range which includes numbness, stupor, rigidity, motionlessness, confusion, surprise, and perplexity. Our translator clearly made a mistake and opted for a meaning which the Aramaic word can indeed carry but which is utterly unsuitable in this context. As Hellenists we must leave the detailed study of Semitic intrusions in the Greek of the Mani Codex to the specialists. But there can be no doubt that the Greek Life of Mani was translated from an Aramaic original. This fact is of considerable consequence for our understanding of Manichaean missionary activities in the West. The Syriac works of Mani and his disciples passed through Greek channels before St. Augustine could read them in Latin and before Coptic translations were made for Egyptian monks.

The Coptic Manichaean library which surfaced in 1930 consists of several liturgical and homiletic works. In sheer quantity and diversity of content, its importance far exceeds that of the Cologne Codex. What makes the Mani Codex unique is the special kind of information it

¹⁸ *CMC* 84.12-17, with the editors' note.

¹⁹ For a typical catalogue of negative epithets as applied to water in a Gnostic denunciation of baptismal rites, see *CG* VII 37.22 ff, trans. F. Wisse in J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library* (1977) 324: "They are deceived by manifold demons, thinking that through baptism with the uncleanness [ἀκαθαρσία, cf. *CMC* 95.2] of water, that which is dark [cf. *CMC* 77.17 f], feeble, idle [ἀργόν], and disturbing [ἐκφορῶν, better rendered as "destructive," cf. *CMC* 77.13-79.6], he will take away the sins." The Greek loan-word ἀργόν (sc. ὕδωρ), though hardly applicable to water in an original Greek text, would be a more suitable translation of the Mandaic verb *tahma* when used of stagnant water than the τεταμνωμένα (sc. ὕδατα) of the *CMC*.

contains. Its content is largely historical, not doctrinal, and it illuminates a period of Mani's life which aroused more controversy among scholars than any other. But much like the Gospels, the Mani Codex is a highly problematic source for the historical reconstruction of its hero's life. Unlike Jesus, Mani, in his own writings, was his best witness. But the accounts he gave of his youth were doubtless colored by legend and doctrine. The oral and written recollections of Mani's disciples, however faithful, will have multiplied the possibilities of error and distortion. For this reason, disagreement among scholars will no doubt continue and could conceivably get worse. But the issues have changed drastically: we are now able to discuss details of Mani's early career that were considered unknowable less than a decade ago.

III. THE ELCHASAITTE CONNECTION

By far the most dramatic increase in our knowledge of Mani's early life is due to five separate excerpts on pp. 72-99. Two of them are ascribed to Baraies, one to Timotheos, another jointly to Abiesus and Innaios, and the fifth to a name which cannot be recovered with certainty. Apart from their contributions to the codex, we know next to nothing about these Manichees.²⁰ Baraies was a "teacher" (*διδάσκαλος*), the second highest rank in the Manichaean hierarchy, and his name, nothing more, is found in Christian and Arabic accounts of Manichaeism. Although Mani's second successor as pope was called Innaios, he need not be identical with the "Innaïos brother of Zabel" mentioned in the codex. Three additional excerpts are ascribed to Timotheos elsewhere in the codex, and one to Baraies. But only Baraies has an unmistakable literary identity. So distinct is his personal style that he can be identified as the source of the long apologetic excerpt on pp. 45-72 whose title is lost. One would like to know why Baraies shines more than the other authorities, both in the artistic presentation of his material and in intellectual depth. Was he genuinely superior, or was he closer to Mani? Whatever the explanation, there can be no doubt that the best information in the codex bears the name and stamp of Baraies.

Being a compilation made from different sources, the codex lacks continuity of content and a homogeneous literary form. More often than not, transition from one excerpt to the next is abrupt and leaves chronological and thematic gaps which the editor did not close. He made no attempt, for instance, to connect the brief sketch of Mani's spiritual

²⁰ *ZPE* 5 (1970) 110-112.

development by Baraies, on pp. 72–74, with the pair of parables that follows on pp. 74–79. The second parable and the long account of Mani’s final dispute with the baptists on pp. 79–99 are equally unconnected. Sudden breaks in the narrative are in fact a mark of authenticity in a work which purports to be an anthology. By the same token, cases of continuous narrative between two excerpts arouse our suspicion and require explanation.

The most conspicuous example of unexpected continuity can be found on p. 94. At the top of that page, the name of a new authority, perhaps to be read as Zacheas, interrupts an otherwise continuous and carefully structured speech by Mani himself which begins on p. 91.20, in an excerpt from Baraies. In this speech, Mani answers the baptists who charged him with four counts of religious nonconformity: his rejection of their baptisms; his being in conflict with the “commandments of the Lord”; his violations of their dietary laws; and finally, his refusal to do agricultural work. In his answer, and still within the excerpt from Baraies, Mani replies to the second and third charge. After this, the excerpt breaks off in the middle of Mani’s reply; the new source is introduced at p. 94.1, and Mani continues his speech, and addresses himself to the remaining charges, without any immediate break in the argument. This is clearly too good to be true. No mechanical combination of two separate accounts of the same incident could ever produce such a smooth continuity of form and content. What has happened here?

The answer lies in the first eight lines of text on p. 94. Although they follow the name of the new source, they continue the I-narrative of the preceding source and repeat the baptists’ first charge against Mani, that is, his rejection of their purifications by water. The crucial lines are as follows (CMC 94.1–14):

Ζα . . . [—]

Εἰ τοίνυν περὶ τοῦ βαπτίσματος κατηγορεῖτε μου, ἰδοὺ πάλιν ἐκ τοῦ νόμου ὑμῶν δείκνυμι ὑμῖν καὶ ἐξ ἐκείνων τῶν ἀποκαλυφθέντων τοῖς μείζουσιν ὑμῶν ὅτι οὐ δέον ἐστὶ βαπτίζεσθαι. δείκνυσσι γὰρ Ἀλχασαῖος ὁ ἀρχηγὸς τοῦ νόμου ὑμῶν πορευομένου γὰρ αὐτοῦ λούσασθαι εἰς ὕδατα . . .

After this passage, however, Mani falls silent, and the I-narrative of which he is the subject is abandoned. This sudden change in narrative style contrasts sharply with the undisturbed continuation of the argument on pp. 94–99 which completes Mani’s defense. The discrepancy discloses a familiar pattern of editorial tampering and suggests the answer to our question: the editor doctored his text and interpolated

the transition on p. 94.2-9 in order to mediate between two disparate sources.

His first source, Baraies, is highly literary and sophisticated. Mani is the main speaker throughout. His two speeches, on pp. 80-85 and 91-93 respectively, are extremely clever. His arguments are based on formal *reductio ad absurdum* and on the authority of alleged sayings of Jesus. The second source on pp. 94-99, perhaps Zacheas, is totally different. It consists of six separate stories which do not mention Mani or Jesus but such baptist authorities as Elchasai, Sabbaios (whose name means "baptist"), and Aianos. Each story is introduced by stereotyped formulae such as *δείκνυσι, καὶ πάλιν, ἔφη δ' αὖ πάλιν*, and *πάλιν δείκνυσι*. Compared to Baraies, the second source is simplicity itself: a mere collection of edifying conversion stories, with baptists behaving as if they were Manichees.

This is the most serious case of redactional activity in the whole codex. There are a few others, but they are mild by comparison. Close form-critical scrutiny of the anthology reveals that the editor reproduced his sources faithfully. The few changes he did make are superficial and easy to detect. His claim of multiple authorship which is maintained throughout the codex is thus confirmed. The excerpts of which the codex is composed are therefore authentic in the sense that they seem to derive from the sources to which they are ascribed. But to what extent do they reflect historical reality rather than biographical fiction?

Every single piece of new information in the codex has to be examined on its own merit. Mani's dispute with the baptists on pp. 79-99 constitutes the largest body of new data. Its literary form, that of a controversy dialogue which provokes a schism, is inspired by similar descriptions of religious conflict in John and Acts. Mani's argument against repeated baptism borrows from a chapter in Hebrews. But conscious imitation of established literary convention does not automatically discredit the events thus described. Mani in his own writings adopted New Testament phraseology, especially from St. Paul. Only careful scrutiny can separate fact from fiction. In the present context, two questions need to be answered. Who exactly were Mani's baptists, and who was Elchasai, their alleged founder?

In the Cologne Codex, the baptists are plainly called *βαπτισταί*, after their distinctive custom. But modern scholars have learned from the Christian heresiologists that many different groups of baptists inhabited the ancient lands between the Jordan and the Persian Gulf. In their efforts to deal with the widespread baptist movement, scholars

have traditionally adopted a rather sophisticated terminology. But scholarly nomenclature is usually not a true mirror of the actual situation which it is designed to recapture. Our case is no exception. The existing code names are not unambiguous, and they are subject to misuse.

Some of the terms are generic and group the baptists, according to their basic concept of god, as Jewish, Christian, or Gnostic. But these three categories are by no means mutually exclusive. In fact the most common modern description of many baptist sects is Jewish-Christian. Historically the origins of the baptist movement can be traced to the heterodox fringes of Judaism, to the sort of religious habitat which produced John the Baptist and the Qumran community. After the Roman conquest of Judea most baptist sects moved to Transjordan and perhaps further eastward to northern Mesopotamia and eventually to Babylonia. The chronology and circumstances of this migration are unknown.²¹ The most distant groups must have reached their destinations by the end of the second century. During their long journey, few baptist groups were able to preserve their Jewish heritage unadulterated. They usually adopted Christian elements at one time or another, with the result that the vast majority of attested baptists is properly described as Jewish-Christian. They combine with their Jewish ritualism, the belief in Jesus as prophet, the practice of the Eucharist and the use of Christian scriptures. Whether Jewish or Jewish-Christian, baptists in general were potentially open to Gnostic influence which could lead to a deemphasis of ritual and to a spiritual reinterpretation of baptismal rites.

In addition to such generic labels, scholars use individual names for specific groups of baptists. These specific names are often derived from the putative founding father of the group, or from a central religious concept. They include the Essenes, Johannites, Ebionites, Elchasaites, and Mandaeans.

If we apply this terminology to Mani's baptists, they turn out to be Jewish-Christian in their general outlook and Elchasaite through distant affiliation with Elchasai. But even the best of scholars in the thorny field of ancient sectarianism would hardly know exactly who Mani's baptists were if we described them to him as Jewish-Christian Elchasaites. Let us therefore translate each of the three distinctive name tags — baptist, Jewish-Christian, and Elchasaite — into the concrete language of actual

²¹ The origins and early history of the Mandaeans and other baptist sects in Babylonia are a highly controversial subject. I agree with the majority of scholars who think that the Mandaeans were not indigenous to that region but moved there from the west. See K. Rudolph, *Die Mandäer* I (1960) 59–252.

cult-practices and of Mani's criticism of them as attested in the Cologne Codex.

They are baptists because they wash their bodies daily in running water for ritual purposes. We are not told whether their daily baptisms were total immersions in water or merely ablutions, or whether they practised both on different occasions and perhaps for different purposes. According to Mani, his baptists practised their water rites in order to be ritually clean (*καθαίρεσθαι*).²² Ritual purity is indeed one of the main purposes of baptism in other baptist sects. But other functions, though less conspicuous, are equally important, especially baptism as an initiation rite for the purpose of admission into Judaism or Christianity, or baptism as a means of obtaining remission of sins.

The use of baptism for sacramental purposes is not mentioned by Mani. Mani's silence does not necessarily mean that his baptists recognized baptism only as a purification rite. Perhaps Mani did not tell the whole story. He taunted the baptists for their belief that lustration with water could actually keep the body clean. In Mani's eyes, the body was dirty by nature and an unceasing producer of waste. He argued very logically that the need to repeat the baptismal rites daily proved their inefficiency. If they could actually cleanse the body, he said, one baptism would have been enough once and for all. Rites which proved inefficient to achieve physical purification would be even less suitable for spiritual housecleaning. Although Mani stopped short of making this point, it is clearly implied in his argument.

There is another consideration which suggests that Mani's baptists used their rites for other than physical purposes. Mani's own religion required a rigid penitential discipline aimed to achieve forgiveness of sin. It is quite possible that Mani inherited his obsession with sin and penitence from the baptists and that he spiritualized their ritual solution to the problem of guilt. Even the language of water rites was retained in Manichaeism as a metaphor for spiritual purification.²³

Apart from their preoccupation with baptismal rites, Mani's baptists combined Christian traditions with their Jewish heritage. The most universal feature which identifies Jewish-Christian groups is their strict observance of ritual laws in addition to a belief in Jesus Christ's mission. Mani's baptists, too, accepted the authority of Christ's teachings. In the Cologne Codex, they refer to the "commandments of the Lord" (*ἐντολαὶ τοῦ σωτῆρος*) as a standard of right conduct while they continued to practise many customs which are clearly of Jewish origin and

²² CMC 80.22-85.12.

²³ L. Koenen, "From Baptism to the Gnosis of Manichaeism," in the Proceedings of the Yale Conference on Gnosticism (above, n.6).

which Christians of the Pauline type had abolished one and a half centuries earlier.²⁴

In their theological dispute with Mani, the baptists describe their religion expressly as “our law and that of the fathers in which we have been living since olden times.”²⁵ Their legalism included not only regular baptisms but also minute dietary laws which even required the ablution of all food in water. Certain varieties of vegetables and fruit were forbidden. A special taboo prohibited the use of wheat bread (σίτῳνος ἄπρως) which was known to the baptists as “Greek bread,” that is, bread of the gentiles. We do not know why the baptists despised wheat bread, and which breadstuff they used themselves.²⁶ It is equally unclear whether or not the Jewish practice of using unleavened bread for ritual purposes has any bearing on this problem. But their preference for some foods, and their rejection of others, connect Mani’s baptists with the mainstream of Jewish Christianity. In the Pseudo-Clementines, which advocate Jewish-Christian customs, the unlawful conduct of the gentiles is summarized in a typical phrase as “the indiscriminate use of food.”²⁷

The requirements of ritual purity extended to everything the baptists ate. Their food had to be washed before it could be consumed.²⁸ From the point of view of modern health standards, this was a perfectly reasonable requirement. But it seems to have been unusual even by the standards of Jewish ritual law.²⁹ A comparable practice can be found

²⁴ *HSCP* 77 (1973) 47 ff.

²⁵ *CMC* 91.6–9; cf. Hipp. Ref. 9.14.1 δειν . . . κατὰ νόμον ζῆν (reported as an Elchasaite doctrine).

²⁶ *HSCP* 77 (1973) 50 f as modified by Koenen (above, n.1) 182 n. 110.

²⁷ *Hom.* 2.19.2 οὐκ ἐξεστιν ἰᾶσθαι τὰ ἔθνη, εὐκότα κυσὶν διὰ τὸ ἀδιαφόροις χρᾶσθαι τροφαῖς καὶ πράξεσιν.

²⁸ *CMC* 80.1–3; 80.23–83.13; 88.13–15; cf. the *Fihrist* on the Mughtasilah (below, n.33).

²⁹ It is not entirely clear whether ritual ablutions of food were known in Pharisaic Judaism; they are not mentioned in rabbinical texts. Mark 7.4 (cf. Luke 11.37 ff) καὶ ἂν ἄγορᾶς ἐὰν μὴ βαπτίσωνται (v.l. ῥαντίωνται, sc. the Pharisees) οὐκ ἐσθίουσιν is a controversial passage often discussed in this connection; but it seems to refer to purification of the whole body through immersion in water (W. Brandt, *Jüdische Reinheitslehre und ihre Beschreibung in den Evangelien* [1910] 34–41, 148). *CMC* 81.5 f ἐπὶ τὴν καθάρσιν ἑαυτοῦ τὴν ἐδωδὴν suggests, however, that Mark 7.19 καθαρῖζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα, another textual crux, should indeed be taken as an implicit reference to ritual cleaning of food (see our n.189 on *CMC* 81.11 f). Apart from Mani’s baptists and the Mughtasilah in the *Fihrist* (below, n.33), only the Mandaeans “washed” their food; see, for instance, *Ginza*, *Right* 225.4 ff trans. M. Lidzbarski (1925): “Alles, was ihr von den Märkten und Strassen hereinbringet, waschet mit Wasser und esset es dann. Wer es nicht abwäscht und isst, wird auf Eisgeräten [“Marterinstrumente des Hagels” according to Brandt, *Reinheitslehre* 35] gepeinigt werden.”

among the Mandaeans who cleansed a certain type of ritual bread in running water.³⁰

Another passage in the section on the baptists seems to suggest that Mani's baptists observed the Jewish sabbath. They are credited with "the keeping of the resting of the hands," an expression which recurs in Mandaean polemic against the Christian Sunday and Jewish sabbath.³¹

Pauline Christianity was the antipode of Jewish Christianity. The common Jewish-Christian term of abuse for St. Paul was "Greek." In the Gospel of John (7.35), the Jews suspect Jesus of "going to the dispersion of the Greeks and teaching the Greeks," which was exactly what Paul had done. Mani's baptists too used the word "Greek" in the same derogatory sense and suspected Mani of "going to the Greeks," or "to the gentiles (ἔθνῃ)." ³² Again an historical fact, that of Jewish-Christian aversion to gentiles, is couched in New Testament phraseology. In retrospect, the suspicion of Mani's baptists was more than justified. Because of his baptist background, Mani's gnosticism tended to be more ritualistic than that of most earlier Gnostic groups. But compared to the baptists and their literal observance of Jewish ritual laws, Mani's own religiosity was clearly more spiritual and to that extent perhaps more "Greek."

The new profile of this baptist group in southern Babylonia is an important addition to the general picture of Jewish Christianity which used to be very sketchy for this region. But the information which we have reviewed so far, though very valuable, was hardly sensational. What came as a real sensation, however, was the alleged connection of Mani's baptists with Elchasai.

The Cologne Codex, we remember, confirms and corrects an-Nadim's remarks, in his precious history of Manichaeism, on Mani's childhood, youth and first public appearance. The Muslim scholar must have had access to Manichaean books translated from Syriac into Arabic which belonged to the same biographical tradition as the excerpts in the Cologne Codex. Where the Greek and the Arabic versions are in agreement, they speak to us with equal but not independent authority. Their combined testimony reflects Manichaean claims but not necessarily historical fact. In the case of Elchasai, separation of fact from fiction is unusually difficult.

³⁰ Rudolph, *Die Mandäer* II (1961) 124, 132 f.

³¹ *HSCP* 77 (1973) 48 f.; Rudolph (above, n.1) 482 n.3.

³² *HSCP* 77 (1973) 51 f.

In a later chapter of the *Fihrist*, an-Nadim describes a baptist sect of his own time in southern Babylonia and traces its lineage back to a founder named al-Ḥasiḥ and to a time when these baptists were the same as Mani's baptists.³³ In 1856, the Lithuanian orientalist Daniel Chwolsohn proposed to identify this al-Ḥasiḥ with the Elchasai of the Christian heresiologists, an identification which has since been generally accepted.³⁴ But no agreement has been reached on its historical value, or if historical, on its implications for the dark history of the baptist movement in the marshes of Babylonia during the third century A.D. Two fundamental questions have defied a definitive answer to this day, and a satisfactory solution is nowhere in sight. How did Mani's baptists come under Elchasaite influence? And given their existence as a separate group at that time, where do the Mandaeans belong in respect to both Elchasaite baptists and their apparent splinter, Manichaeism?

The Cologne Codex adds incisive information which confirms an-Nadim's testimony and Chwolsohn's identification. On pp. 94–97, Elchasai is mentioned eight times as the founder (ἄρχηγός) of the baptist sect of which Mani was a member. But the stories told about him on

³³ The *Fihrist* trans. Dodge (above, n.3) II 811: "The Mughtasilah [cf. above, n.7]. These people are very numerous in the regions of al-Baṭā'iḥ; they are [called] the Šābat al-Baṭā'iḥ [Sabians of the Marshlands]. They observe ablution as a rite and wash everything which they eat. *Their head is known as al-Ḥasiḥ and it is he who instituted their sect. They assert that the two existences are male and female and that the herbs are from the likeness of the male, whereas the parasite plants are from the likeness of the female, the trees being veins (roots). They have seven sayings, taking the form of fables. His [al-Ḥasiḥ's] disciple was named Sham'ūn. They agreed with the Manichaeans about the two elemental [principles], but later their sect became separate.* Until this our own day, some of them venerate the stars." It is virtually impossible to decide how much of this information is a first-hand description of the baptists of an-Nadim's own time and how much is merely an historical account, derived from a written (Manichaean?) source, of the same or even a different baptist sect which existed in the same region more than half a millennium earlier. Two of the most urgent questions which arise in this connection cannot be answered with any certainty. Did the Mughtasilah of the tenth century A.D. still remember "al-Ḥasiḥ" as their founding father? (I am inclined to answer no.) Were the Mughtasilah, if different from the earlier baptists of an-Nadim's historical source, identical with the Mandaeans? (Again, I would answer no. But if that part of an-Nadim's account which I reproduced in italics derives from a much older source, the remaining description, though too general for valid conclusions, would fit the Mandaeans.)

³⁴ C. Chwolsohn, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus* (1856) I 112–119, esp. 114 f. Cf. W. Brandt, *Elchasai* (1912) 134 f.; J. Thomas, *Le mouvement baptiste en Palestine et Syrie* (1935) 244 f.; G. Strecker, "Elkesai" in *RAC* 4 (1959) 1178; Rudolph, *Mandäer* I 41 f.; *ZPE* 5 (1970) 133 f.; Rudolph (above, n.1) 476 f.

these pages are, not surprisingly, to a large extent distorted by Manichaean manipulation. The Elchasai of the Mani Codex who refuses to defile the water, to plough the land, and to bake bread is no ordinary baptist but an orthodox Manichaean elect, as his behavior evinces.

Who then was Elchasai? The name is a transliteration of the Aramaic for "Hidden God" or, according to Epiphanius, for "Hidden Power."³⁵ Most scholars assume with the ancient heresiologists that Elchasai was a historical figure who lived during the reign of Trajan in northern Mesopotamia.³⁶ They compare him with Simon Magus, an earlier prophet, who was called "Great Power." But Elchasai's historicity is not beyond challenge. No ancient author had any creditable knowledge of Elchasai as a person. The so-called Book of Elchasai was widely read but its alleged author remained unknown. It is possible, therefore, that Elchasai is either a pseudonym or the name of a divine hypostasis and that no person of that name ever existed. In any case, Elchasai had acquired a definite religious identity by A.D. 200 at the latest.

The alleged pedigree of the book is as metaphysical as the name attached to it.³⁷ Of heavenly origin, it surfaced in Parthia where Elchasai received it and gave it to the Sobiai, a generic name for "baptists."³⁸ In other words, the book apparently originated in northern Mesopo-

³⁵ The etymology of Elchasai's name is still controversial; see most recently Rudolph (above, n.1) 476 note, and Chr. Elsas, *Neuplatonische und gnostische Weltablehnung in der Schule Plotins* (RGVV 34, 1975) 34-39 (whose far-fetched speculations are implausible).

³⁶ For example Rudolph (above, n.1) 476 note: "Sicher ist jetzt [i.e., after the discovery of the CMC], dass es sich tatsächlich bei Elchasai um eine charismatische Person handelt, was z. B. Schoeps noch bestritt [H.-J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums* (1949) 326]." The CMC merely confirms what amounts to the *communis opinio* about Elchasai in the first half of the third century A.D. But there is no guarantee that ancient belief in the historicity of Elchasai as a person was justified.

³⁷ The main sources for the Book of Elchasai (Hipp. *Ref.* 9.13-17, 10.29; Epiphanius *Pan.* 19 and 30; Origen at Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.38) are collected in A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (1973) 54-67, 114-123, 146 f, 154-161, 184-187.

³⁸ Origen at Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.38 "fallen from heaven"; Hipp. *Ref.* 9.13.1-2 ἐπῆλθε (sc. Alcibiades) τῇ 'Ρώμῃ φέρων βιβλον τινὰ φάσκων ταύτην ἀπὸ Σηρῶν τῆς Παρθίας παραληφέναι τινὰ ἀνδρα δίκαιον [below, n.50] 'Ηλχασαί, ἣν παρέδωκε τινὶ λεγομένῳ Σοβιαί χρηματισθεῖσαν ὑπ' ἀγγέλου ("... which he [Elchasai] handed over to someone called Sobiai after it had been revealed by an angel.") According to Hippolytos, therefore, the successive recipients of the book included "the Seres" (the Chinese?) of Parthia (who apparently received it through the mediation of the angel); Elchasai; the Sobiai (baptists); and finally Alcibiades who brought it to Rome c. A.D. 220.

tamia and in a baptist milieu.³⁹ After all, books said to have fallen from heaven, *Himmelsbriefe*, were usually written on earth.⁴⁰ Internal evidence establishes that the Book of Elchasai was written before A.D.118/119, presumably in Aramaic rather than Greek. A Greek version of it was available in Syria around 200, in Rome around 220 and in Palestine in 247. In view of its known chronology and distribution, it would seem attractive that the Book of Elchasai should have made its way to an Aramaic-speaking baptist group in Babylonia in the late second or early third century. Obviously the proper question to ask is whether or not Mani's baptists and their doctrine conform to what we know about the book's content.

The Book of Elchasai preached the practice of repeated baptism; further, some sort of cosmological dualism based on the elements of water and fire; divine revelation through the mediation of an angel of gigantic size; seven oath witnesses which include water and earth; certain astrological practices; the observance of the sabbath; and a remarkable christology of the Jewish-Christian type according to which Christ was part of a continuing series of incarnations of an eternal savior.

Two of these customs, repeated baptism and the sabbath rest, are explicitly ascribed to Mani's baptists in the Cologne Codex. In addition, they must have known the doctrine of the True Prophet who is incarnated at regular intervals.⁴¹ This would explain why some baptists were convinced that Mani was one such incarnation, while others regarded him as the False Prophet whose coming had been foretold by their forefathers.⁴² Two further parallels may be added from Epiphanius, although they cannot be linked conclusively to the Book of Elchasai. Certain Elchasaites, he claims, refused to eat meat, and Elchasai himself rejected sacrifices and *σαρκοφαγία*; he recognized as his main authorities "the fathers and the law."⁴³ The frequent references to

³⁹ W. Brandt, *Die jüdischen Baptismen* (1910) 107-110, *Elchasai* (1912) 42-44; Rudolph, *Mandäer* I 236, Chwolson (above, n.34) I 114 f.

⁴⁰ W. Speyer, *Bücherfunde in der Glaubenswerbung der Antike* (1970) 23-42, on "Himmelsbriefe," one of the most ancient types of sacred writ, which the author defines, on p. 17, as "eine schriftliche Botschaft, die von Gott verfasst, plötzlich von einem Menschen . . . gefunden wird," and in which he includes "Bücher vom Himmel" such as the Book of Elchasai (discussed on pp. 36 ff).

⁴¹ Cf. *HSCP* 77 (1973) 25 and 54 f; Koenen (above, n.1) 162 n.29. The key passages for this concept are *Wisdom* 7.27 (with D. Winston's note); *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 3.20.2; *Hipp. Ref.* 9.14.1 and 10.29.2; Epiph. *Pan.* 53.1.8; the Apocalypse of Adam in the Nag Hammadi Library.

⁴² See editors' notes on *CMC* 86.17-87.12.

⁴³ Epiph. *Pan.* 53.1.4 and 19.3.6 (vegetarianism); *Pan.* 19.3.6 (the fathers and the law).

fruits, vegetables, and trees by Mani's baptists, and their agrarian life in general, imply that they too were vegetarians. The obscure comments on herbs and plants in the *Fihrist* would seem to provide a theological rationale for some of the food taboos of Mani's baptists.⁴⁴ And like Elchasai, they too lived by the law (*νόμος* in the codex) and the traditions of their fathers.

These similarities are substantial, and the Manichaean claim that Mani's baptists were Elchasaite is not wholly unfounded. Of course, other baptist groups, outside those described in the Book of Elchasai and the Cologne Codex, may have exhibited similar features. In this connection, a third text deserves consideration. The *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* ascribe to their hero Peter the practice of repeated ablutions in running water along with a vegetarian diet and belief in a True Prophet who appeared in the course of history under different names and in various shapes.⁴⁵ This peculiar portrait of Peter derives ultimately from a Jewish-Christian source composed in Syria around A.D. 200. It has often been suggested that this source was under Elchasaite influence, or at least that it shared a common "Ebionite" ancestor with the Book of Elchasai.⁴⁶ The Cologne Codex adds weight to the assumption, now virtually inescapable, that such connections existed and that the Book of Elchasai and the name of its alleged author enjoyed much wider circulation in the East than the few explicit attestations would suggest.

But predictably, some contradictions and numerous problems remain. According to Epiphanius, Elchasai detested virginity, hated chastity, and compelled his followers to marry.⁴⁷ The ascetic bishop of Salamis was ever so ready to ascribe lax sexual mores to the unorthodox. But in this particular case, he simply overstated the plain truth: Jews, Jewish-Christians, and also the Mandaeans endorsed marriage and procreation. According to the *Fihrist*, however, Mani's father heard a voice which told him to eat no meat, to drink no wine, and to abstain

⁴⁴ Above, n.33.

⁴⁵ *Hom.* 8.2.5 par., 10.1.1 f, 10.26.2 par., 11.1.1 (ablutions); *Hom.* 12.6.4 and 15.7.6 (vegetarian diet); *Hom.* 3.17-28 (True Prophet; above, n.41). On the ablutions in the *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* and *Rec.*, see G. Strecker in W. Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (2nd ed., 1964) 271 f versus K. Rudolph, *Mandäer* I 240. Strecker attempts, unconvincingly to my mind, to differentiate between various sources and their respective theologies, and between "ritual ablutions" which were "genuinely Jewish" and baptismal practices of the "so-called baptist sects."

⁴⁶ Rudolph, *Mandäer* I 239-246.

⁴⁷ *Pan.* 19.1.7.

from women, a tradition which is confirmed by a Manichaean fragment in Parthian dialect.⁴⁸ The *Fihrist* has no doubt that Mani's father joined the baptists out of obedience to that voice. In Manichaean texts, therefore, Mani's baptists were portrayed as rigorous encratites, similar to the Manichaean elect. Although the Cologne Codex is not very explicit on this point, its baptists too seem to have been a male society because women are never mentioned. The accuracy of this Manichaean tradition cannot be fully verified. If accurate, however, their aversion to sexuality would make Mani's baptists unique among baptist sects. On the other hand, strict asceticism was a hallmark of early Syrian Christianity.

The Book of Elchasai also advocated belief in the power of the stars, and the *Fihrist* too ascribes star worship to the baptists of an-Nadim's own time. The Cologne Codex, however, makes no reference to astrology. Its silence here is necessarily inconclusive and must not be construed as an instance of serious disagreement. Even if Mani's baptists had no interest in astrology, they could still be followers of the elusive Elchasai.

On the positive side, one might add that the Elchasaites whom Origen knew "used passages from every part of the Old Testament and the Gospels but rejected the Apostle entirely." This description would fit Mani's baptists, as is borne out by their arguments in the codex where they seem to acknowledge the *ἐντολαὶ τοῦ σωτῆρος* but implicitly reject Paul as Greek.⁴⁹

How then were Mani's baptists related to Elchasai? The full answer cannot be found in the Cologne Codex or in any other source. There are two chief obstacles which obstruct our view. In the first place, the Greek Book of Elchasai as quoted by Hippolytus and Epiphanius may not adequately reflect the full spectrum and variety of Elchasaite beliefs.

⁴⁸ Above, n.7. The Parthian fragment, found by a Chinese expedition to the Tarim basin in 1928/29, will be published by W. Sundermann in *Acta Ant. Hung.* (Festschrift Harmatta). The moral code of Mani's baptists suspiciously recalls the asceticism of the Manichaean elect (Henrichs, *HSCP* 77 [1973] 53 n.114) as laid down in the Iranian fragment M 2 v. I 9 f (W. Henning, *Sitzungsb. Preuss. Akad. Wiss.* 1933, 304: "Fleisch und Wein genossen wir nicht, von [Frauen] halten wir uns fern.") and in the *Fihrist* (trans. Dodge [above, n.3] II 788: "... refrain from eating meats, drinking wine, as well as from marriage."). Two of the three prohibitions reoccur in an unusual Arabic text of the tenth century which deals with Jewish Christianity and Manichaeism: "He (Mani) mentions that women, sacrifices and eating meat were forbidden by him (Christ) to everybody." (trans. S. Pines, "The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a New Source," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 2 [1968] 302).

⁴⁹ Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 6.38; *HSCP* 77 (1973) 51 ff.

For instance, nothing in the extant quotations points to vegetarianism, whereas Epiphanius ascribes this practice to some Elchasaites, a claim which finds support in the Cologne Codex. Second, we must allow that Manichaean tradition was without question capable of distorting the historical record. In fact the baptists of the Cologne Codex do not themselves claim Elchasai as their authority. Mani does so for them, but — this is crucial — he does it in the course of an excerpt, on pp. 94–97, which did not originally belong to Mani's speech against the baptists, of which it now forms the conclusion. Rather, it owes its present place, and its attribution to Mani, to the redactor who put it into Mani's mouth, apparently not on good authority. Though plainly interpolated and full of Manichaean bias, the four stories about Elchasai in the Cologne Codex seem to echo Elchasaite doctrine if only distantly. Their emphasis on earth, water, and bread recalls the Book of Elchasai in which the same three elements are invoked as oath witnesses; in particular, the "voice of the water" in the Book of Elchasai seems to be echoed by the water personified which talks to Elchasai in the Cologne Codex.⁵⁰

Would it make historical sense to conclude that the close similarities between Mani's baptists and Elchasaite tradition count for nothing and that their alleged connection with Elchasai is merely an unhistorical construct of Manichaean biography? Hardly. It is extremely unlikely that the true picture has been blurred beyond recognition. The consistent pattern of authentic Jewish-Christian beliefs and practices with which Mani's baptists are credited in the Cologne Codex proves beyond reasonable doubt that Mani had a Jewish-Christian past.⁵¹ It is inconceivable that he would have claimed a background so alien to the basic tenets of his own religion if the circumstances of his actual life had not warranted it. By the same token, it is not readily obvious why Mani, let alone later Manichaean tradition, would have included Elchasai in the number of baptist authorities alongside Sabbaios and Aianos (who are otherwise unknown) if the connection had not been based on his-

⁵⁰ Koenen (above, n.1) 181–190 as modified by Koenen (above, n.23) section II; ZPE 32 (1978) 120 ff nn.229 and 288 (bread), n.273 (water), n.284 (earth); CMC 94.9–96.16 and Epiphan. Pan. 19.3.7 (voice of the water). Elchasai is δίκαιος both in Hipp. Ref. 9.13.2 (above, n.38) and CMC 95.10 (HSCP 77 [1973] 46 n.84; Rudolph [above, n.1] 484 n.2; ZPE 32 [1978] n.278).

⁵¹ Klijn and Reinink (above, n.37) 66 came apparently to the opposite conclusion, without arguing their case: "Since nothing is said about Christian beliefs, the Kitab al-Fihrist [above, nn.7 and 33] and the Manichaean papyrus [the CMC] are of no importance for the study of Jewish Christianity." Even if the first half of their statement were true, few scholars would accept their conclusion.

torical fact, most likely the adoption by Mani's baptists of the Book of Elchasai or of some other baptist manual ascribed to him.⁵²

A final word about the Mandaeans. Mani's Elchasaites took a ritual bath every day, washed everything they ate, and baked their own bread. The closest parallels for this set of customs are Mandaean. The Mandaeans are an anti-Christian group of gnosticizing baptists with Jewish roots, whose remnants survive to this day in Southern Iraq. Some scholars assumed that Mani's baptists were a Mandaean community. But their Elchasaite background and pro-Christian leanings according to the Cologne Codex now rule out their identity with the Mandaeans, whose contacts with early Manichaeism must have a different explanation. Both groups, Mani's baptists and the Mandaeans, were offshoots of the same baptist movement which was originally Jewish rather than Babylonian but came under Christian and Gnostic influence at an early date.⁵³

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⁵² W. Sundermann, *Acta Orientalia* 36 (1974) 129 f and 148 discusses a Manichaean fragment in Parthian dialect which has a reference to the year 539 of the Seleucid era, or A.D. 228 (the year of Mani's first major revelation), on recto and which mentions Elchasai on verso. We know that Mani used this method of dating the major events of his life in one of his works, the *Shābuhragān*. It is highly probable, therefore, that the Parthian fragment reproduces an autobiographical tradition which goes back to Mani himself. If so, the "Elchasaite connection" will have originated with Mani and not with his followers.

⁵³ Rudolph (above, n.1) 482.